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ABSTRACT

This report evaluates the college transfer policies of each of the 15 member states of the Southern Regional Education Board--Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. States are urged to develop common standards for core curriculum requirements to facilitate the increasing numbers of students transferring between institutions of higher education, especially between two-year and four-year institutions. Specific recommendations to states include: common general education requirements; awarding third-year status to students who earn associate degrees at four-year colleges; using computer technology to inform students on how their credits will be accepted at any public college in the state; establishing statewide transfer committees to evaluate and develop policies; and using transfer coordinators to advise students on transfer possibilities. (DB)

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In 15 SREB States

Improving College Transfer Policies is Focus

By Joseph D. Creech

"Educational policy can no longer be based on the assumption that students enrolling at one campus will graduate from that same campus two or four years later. Of all new students enrolling in the University of Maryland System, 52 percent were transfer students."

Excerpt from Maryland Higher Education Commission Annual Report

"An increasing number of our students in higher education are transfer students, and when their courses do not transfer, they have to take the course again and pay tuition and fees again. And the worst news is that taxpayers have to pick up some 80 percent of the cost of doing that course one more time. It is very expensive."

Senator Teel Bivins, Chairman, Senate Education Committee, Texas

"Easing transfer procedures is one of many "student success" initiatives that the State Regents have implemented over the past few years. By smoothing the transfer process, we are helping students to fulfill their educational goals more easily and economically."

Chancellor Hans Brisch, Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

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Not many years ago, the majority of students receiving bachelor's degrees enrolled at a four-year college and finished their degree programs at the same college. It's a new day.

- Enrollment at two-year colleges is increasing faster than at four-year colleges in most SREB states. In Florida, half the public four-year college graduates started their degree programs at two-year colleges.
- The number of students transferring from four-year to two-year colleges or to other four-year colleges is almost as great as the number moving from two-year to four-year institutions.
- More students who complete technical programs at two-year colleges are deciding they want four-year degrees. How senior colleges and universities treat credits earned in occupational technical programs is an issue in several states.

While it's a new day, some old problems occur when colleges and universities disagree over which courses apply toward degrees. Students sometimes discover, after they complete courses that apply to core curricula or associate degrees at one institution, that the courses do not apply to degree requirements at another.

These disagreements can mean higher costs and more time to earn degrees. While many two-year colleges offer classes at relatively low prices, those savings will be lost if students must take classes again at four-year colleges or universities. When students must take additional core curricula or prerequisite courses, what started as four-year programs may become five- or six-year programs.

This makes college transfer policies and practices even more important. The importance is further increased by the growing access to college-level courses through technology. Technology can provide more and easier access to courses, but it will take agreements among different institutions on how to apply credits earned through distance learning toward degrees for the courses to have maximum benefit for students.

Well-thought-out transfer policies and practices can increase the number and percentage of students who complete two- and four-year degrees. When all public colleges and universities in a state agree on how students can fulfill core curriculum requirements (even if they take different courses at different institutions) and on courses that must be completed before taking junior and senior level courses in the major, the transfer process is more predictable. Reaching consensus on a core curriculum also provides a base for assessing student learning and performance.

This report was prepared by Joseph D. Creech, *Director of Educational Policies*.

SREB states are working to untangle conflicting policies, practices and advice that confuse students about transferring from one college to another—particularly when transferring from a two-year to a four-year college. Some states are reworking long established policies to make them more responsive to students. Other states are just beginning to develop statewide policies and procedures.

Here are some of the steps that states and colleges and universities are taking to help students transfer and earn degrees:

- **Common general ed requirements** in English and communications, humanities and fine arts, social sciences, mathematics and natural sciences have been established. The number of semester hours required in general education ranges from 36 to 60 in the SREB states. Core curricula courses taken at any public institution in a state are accepted by all public colleges and universities.
- **Junior year (third year) status is awarded to students who earn associate degrees** by four-year colleges without students having to take additional classes.
- **Technology instantly gives students a computer report on** how their credits will count at any public college in the state. Students know *before* they enroll in a course how that course will be accepted. The same computer technology accelerates the exchange of transcripts and other information important to students.
- **Statewide transfer committees** have been established to evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and recommend how the process might be improved.
- **Transfer coordinators** are required in most states to advise students transferring in and out of the two- or four-year colleges.

In SREB states, much progress is being made to establish or rework transfer policies. Since 1994, two-thirds of the SREB states have taken substantive actions to insure that students who earn college-level credits in one public institution will be able to transfer those credits to others.

Here are some examples:

Alabama:

Legislation calls for a statewide general studies program and transfer agreement and a computerized advisement system to be in place by September, 1998.

A committee of faculty and administrators from two- and four-year colleges has agreed on the number of hours in different subject areas for the general studies program and institutions are proposing courses to be included in the core areas.

Florida:

To carry out a 1995 legislative directive to shorten the time required to complete a bachelor's degree, community colleges and universities are:

- establishing general education requirements that do not exceed 36 semester hours;
- developing common prerequisite courses for each university program within each discipline area and designating all courses as either lower-level (freshman-sophomore) or upper-level (junior-senior) in the statewide course numbering system;
- revising degree programs to require no more than 60 semester hours of college credit in associate of arts programs and no more than 120 hours in bachelor's programs without prior approval;
- ensuring that at least half of the required courses for bachelor's programs are offered at the lower-division level except in areas approved by the Board of Regents;
- planning a single, computer-assisted student advising and degree audit system.

Maryland:

What Transfers? Just Ask the Computer

Maryland's On-Line Transfer System **(ARTSYS)** allows students who are transferring to receive a credit evaluation by following several easy computer steps. Students enter the name of the institutions they are attending; the name of the institutions to which they are transferring and the courses already completed. This chart shows the results when a student trying to transfer from Anne Arundel Community College to Towson State University, entered appropriate information.

SI[1]	Course	Course Name	Equivalency	General Ed. Area(s)[2]	Min Credit[3]	Max Credit[4]	Grade
AA	BPA 111	Business and Its Environment	Lower Level Elective	Not Specified	03.00	03.00	C
AA	ENG 111	Composition & Intro Literature I	ENG 102	I.1A	03.00	03.00	C
AA	ENG 112	Composition & Intro Literature II	Lower Level Elective	IIB 1, III	03.00	03.00	C
AA	MAT 250	Elementary Calculus	MAT 211	IC, IV	03.00	03.00	B
AA	HIS 111	History Western Civilization I	HIS 241	AS, III	03.00	03.00	C

1. SI = Sending Institution 2. General Ed. Area(s) = General education areas to which course is applicable
3. Min Credit = Minimum credit 4. Max Credit = Maximum credit

Two of the more notable elements in Maryland's transfer system are:

- An electronic data information system developed by the University of Maryland system that allows students and advisors at participating public and private colleges and universities to determine the transferability of courses to all participating institutions.

This system also makes it possible to send transcripts from one institution to another electronically.

- The Strategic Plan for Articulation and Transfer that includes these goals:
  - provide access to a computerized transfer credit guide, degree audit and transcript service (Electronic Articulation Technology) for all students and staff in Maryland public colleges and universities;
  - implement procedures for general education regulations;
  - review curricular changes periodically to determine their impact on transfer;
  - ensure that students who transfer have reliable, accurate and current information concerning graduation requirements and the transfer of credits;
  - establish a transfer student data system that provides information about the success of the transfer process among Maryland's public institutions.

North Carolina:

As a result of legislation passed by the General Assembly in 1995, the University of North Carolina and the North Carolina Community College System are jointly developing a comprehensive articulation agreement that, among other things, provides for:

- graduates of two-year degree programs who have completed the general education transfer core to have fulfilled the lower-division, general education requirements of the senior institution;
- acceptance of credits in the general education core completed by graduates of applied science degree programs;
- establishing a comprehensive transfer information system that will provide in print and electronic format clear and precise information on admissions, prerequisite requirements, transferability of courses and transfer policies, electronic exchange of student transcripts; electronic mail network service for transfer advisors and prospective transfer students; and computerized common application forms.
- a report that provides each institution with information on its transfer rate and the performance of students who transferred. The information will be provided to each community college and to the State Board of Community Colleges.

Oklahoma:

The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education have taken many initiatives to make student transfer easier. These include:

- a guarantee that transferring students who completed associates in science and associates in arts degrees have satisfied lower-division general education course requirements at public senior colleges;

- establishing a Course Transfer Problem Hot Line that refers callers to the appropriate institutional vice presidents for discussion and resolution of problems. Records of calls are useful in identifying common transfer problems and in addressing legislative and public concerns;

A Quick Way to Determine Course Equivalency in Oklahoma

The Course Equivalency Project **(CEP)** provides equivalency information about hundreds of courses offered at Oklahoma institutions. A two-letter prefix and three-digit number identify each equivalency group. Credit for a course can be transferred to any institution that sponsors a course in that group. This table shows computer literacy **(CS 001)** course equivalencies at 29 Oklahoma institutions.

Institutions	Computer Literacy CS 001	Institutions	Computer Literacy CS 001
CASC	CS 1103	OSUTB-OKC	CIS 113
CSC	COM 1133	OSUTB-OKM	TEC 1143
CU		OU	MIS 2003
ECU	CMPSC 1513	RCC	CMSC 113
EOSC	CIS 1113	Rogers	CS 2113
LU	CS 1103	Rose	CIS 1093
MSC	CIS 1113	Rose	CIS 1103
NEOAMC	CS 2103	SEOSU	CIS 2433
NOC	CS 1113	SSC	CS 1103
NSU	CS 1003	SWOSU	COMSC 1022
NSU	MIS 1003	TCC	CSC 1203
NWOSU	CMSC 1003	UCO	COMSC 1053
OCCC	CS 1103	USAO	IDS 2003
OPSU	CIS 2113	WOSC	CS 1153
OSU	MSIS 2103		

- forming a faculty transfer curriculum committee that meets annually to establish course equivalencies in different disciplines. Charts showing equivalent courses at Oklahoma colleges and universities based on the committee's reports are distributed to institutions in the system. The committee has involved more than 500 faculty and has identified course equivalents for more than 2,800 courses in 20 academic disciplines.

South Carolina:

In response to 1995 legislation, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education established regulations for the acceptance of credits from two-year technical colleges by four-year colleges and universities. Statewide "transfer blocks" in (1) business administration, (2) arts, social sciences, and humanities, (3) science and mathematics, (4) engineering and engineering technology, (5) teacher education, and (6) nursing, specify courses at technical colleges which all four-year colleges will accept to meet requirements toward certain bachelor's degree programs.

Tennessee:

In 1995, House Joint Resolution 219 of the General Assembly called for the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, the University of Tennessee and the Tennessee Board of Regents to study the process students use in transferring from one institution to another. Following a year of study, a report identified major policy issues and made recommendations for improving the process. The recommendations forwarded to the University of Tennessee System and the Tennessee Board of Regents for implementation include policies and practices implemented in other states, such as using technology to explain admissions procedures and course requirements, developing statewide agreements between two- and four-year colleges, and reducing the wide variations in the number of courses and credit hours in general education for different academic programs and by different institutions.

Texas:

Recently passed legislation directed the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to develop a comprehensive core curricula of at least 42 semester credit hours for all institutions in Texas. The measure guarantees that core courses taken at one institution will be accepted by another.

Almost all public and private two-year colleges in Texas have adopted a common course numbering system to promote transfer of lower-division academic courses. The Texas common course numbering system is considered to be the definitive guide to recognizing the equivalence and transferability of lower-division academic courses at two-year colleges, and many universities publish tables that equate their course numbers to the Texas common course numbering system.

Virginia:

The statewide policy on transfer specifies that graduates of associate degree programs should receive credit for meeting freshmen and sophomore level general education requirements and be given junior status at senior colleges and universities. It also establishes a transfer module that enables students who do not receive associate degrees to plan a program of study that is acceptable for credit at other institutions. The policy urges two- and four-year colleges to work together to develop admissions policies and practices based on sound information about the performance of transfer students.

The state committee on transfer includes representatives from two-year and four-year public colleges, a four-year private college and staff from the State Council for Higher Education, the Community College System and the Department of Education. The committee is shifting its focus from helping institutions comply with the state policy to better communicating transfer information. Plans include developing and collecting information on the progress of students who transfer, completing and reporting on a pilot project involving the electronic exchange of transcript data and exploring the establishment of a statewide electronic transfer assistance system.

Untangling the Transfer Policy Web in Your State

First, accept the premise that it is not easy to standardize transfer policies and practices. It will take time. It will take patience. It will take careful planning and implementation. Not every problem is the result of inappropriate policies. Students also have responsibilities for becoming aware of which courses are required and for delays that result when they change programs of study.

We know that successful policies and practices are those that:

- involve faculty from various disciplines and programs at two-year and four-year institutions in the development of content for core freshman- and sophomore-level courses that are applicable to baccalaureate degrees;
- state clearly admissions requirements and processes for transfer students;
- include policies for transfer of credits for both general education and major fields of study;
- advise transfer students as they enter and leave institutions;
- provide students transferring into institutions with preliminary evaluations of credits at the time of admission and inform them about the remaining requirements for baccalaureate degrees after transfer credits have been applied;
- include a uniform, consistent method for determining the number and percentage of two-year college students who continue their education in four-year colleges;
- monitor the progress of students from two- to four-year colleges (and vice versa) and report on the success of students who transfer;
- use the technology now available to improve communication between colleges and students and the transmission of information from college to college and student to college.